

Watertown Educators Association

To: Watertown School Committee
Tony Palliolo, Chair

From: Watertown Educators Association
David Mastro, President
Ronald Meehan, 1st Vice President
Eleanor Donato, 2nd Vice President
Ralph Gioiosa, Treasurer
Joanna Shea, Secretary
Kathy Taverna, Membership Chair
Debra King, Chairwoman of PR&R

CC: Dr. Steve Hiersche, Superintendent
Dr. Ann Koufman-Frederick, Assistant Superintendent

Date: February 26, 2009

The members of the Watertown Educators Association are concerned over the recent announcement of your process in moving towards appointing Dr. Ann Koufman-Frederick as the next Superintendent of Schools. Our concerns do not stem from the prospect of Dr. Ann Koufman-Frederick becoming the next Superintendent, but rather, from the process in which this decision was reached.

How could the school committee come to the conclusion that any candidate has the “respect and confidence of talented faculty” and that teachers “value and appreciate” any internal candidate without formally asking for our feedback?

We understand your reasons for skipping a formal search process, but we feel strongly that the School Committee should have led a formal interview process with Dr. Ann Koufman-Frederick before moving forward in recommending her appointment. A formal process is critical for two important reasons. First, a process surely would have included interview committees with teacher representatives and public forums which teachers could attend. These procedures would have opened the door to teacher feedback. Of course, we are aware the final decision rests with the School Committee, but as dedicated and committed faculty members, our hope is that the School Committee would have valued our input and feedback in appointing the “lead educators” of our district.

Secondly, in a formal selection process, all candidates would be given the opportunity to communicate their vision of the Watertown Public Schools. Teachers would like to know what Dr. Ann Koufman-Frederick sees as the strengths and weaknesses of our district. We would like to know what some of her short-term and long-term goals would be as Superintendent. Not being able to ask her questions before her appointment leaves us feeling very uncertain as to what initiatives she will focus on.

The manner in which this process was conducted raises more long-term concerns for us. Many existing leadership positions in the district are filled on an interim basis. As these positions begin to be filled, the School Committee's decision to not consult with teachers in the Superintendent process causes us to question how current and future leadership vacancies will be handled. One of the many reasons we love teaching in Watertown is that administrators seek out and value our input on a variety of topics – including the appointment of leaders. If the method in which our next Superintendent is appointed is an indication of how other leadership vacancies will be handled, that is an alarming change in the culture of our schools.

While the WEA Executive Board wrote this memorandum, it was based on a significant amount of feedback from our membership. Thank you for taking the time to read it, and we look forward to discussing your reactions to our concerns. If you would like to set up a meeting with some Watertown Educators Association representatives, please contact David Mastro at dmastro@watertown.k12.ma.us.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David M. Mastro", written over a horizontal line.

David M. Mastro

Watertown Educators Association President